

Old Mission Church
Mackinac Island, Michigan.

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HABS No. Mich. 214

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA
District of Michigan

Historic American Buildings Survey
F. Orla Varney, District Officer
313 Garfield Bldg., Detroit, Mich.

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OLD MISSION CHURCH
Mackinac Island, Mackinac County
Michigan

Owner Board of Trustees of the Old
Mission Church.
Mr. Milton Tootles, Pres.

Date of Erection 1829 & 1830

Architect Unknown

Builder (In part) Martin Heydenburk

Present Condition Good

Number of Stories Basement, 1st floor and balcony

Materials of Construction Entire building of heavy timber
construction plastered throughout.
Roof covered with wood shingles.

Other Existing Records: Historic Mackinac - Edwin O. Wood.
Michigan Historical Collections.

Additional Data: See next page.

SEE PHOTOGRAPH FROM WITTEMAN COLL
IN L.C. SINGLE PICTURE FILE - UNDER
CHURCHES

Additional Data:

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The Northern Missionary Society, organized in 1797, had for its purpose the Christianization of the "heathen in North America and the support and promotion of Christian knowledge in the New Settlements within the United States".

In 1800 it was decided to send a man to travel among the Indians in the districts surrounding the Great Lakes, and two years later, Mr. David Bacon arrived on the Island to propagate Presbyterianism in that district. His stay was short and it was not until 1820 when the Rev. Jedidiah Morse, (the father of the inventor of the telegraph) after a short visit to the Island, again called the attention of the Society to its need, that the Rev. William M. Ferry in 1822 was sent to start a permanent Mission there.

Mr. Ferry at once opened an Indian School, drawing children from great distances, even from the banks of the Mississippi. As the school proved so successful, it was decided that a church should be built. Church services until that time having been conducted in the school.

The church building was begun in the winter of 1829, according to Mr. Martin Heydenburk, who as a youth in New York State, had indentured himself to a carpenter and learned the trade; later having received an education in Onondaga County, N. Y. was appointed to teach in the Mission School. "The people wanted to build a tabernacle, but no one was found competent to make out and prepare a bill of timber. So I was relieved from my school and sent across the Straits to the mainland. In three weeks time, we had all the timber hewn, fifty pieces flattened to be made into scantlings and joists by the whipsaw, and three hundred logs hauled out of the woods to the shore ready to be moved home when the ice should prove favorable".

"The next season we employed men to build the church; but when the frame was up and partly enclosed, and the last vessel was about to sail for Detroit, the men made some exorbitant demands, supposing we must comply or leave the building in that condition through the winter. I was consulted and I said 'Let them go'. On the 28th of October I again left the schoolroom, this time for the top of the steeple, and before winter we had the building enclosed, and on the

Additional Data: (Continued)

4th of March, 1831, it was completed and dedicated".²

The cost of the building was borne, with the exception of \$250.00 given by John Jacob Astor of New York, entirely by the villagers and traders from the interior.

So the church was built, a truly pioneer church, on the wilderness frontier, and probably the oldest Protestant church in the Northwest.

Unfortunately about this time many changes were taking place that affected the Island. Civilization was moving to the west, driving the Indians before it. The American Fur Company closed its doors and in 1836 Mr. Ferry withdrew and the Indian Mission was shortly after that abandoned.

From that time on the old church had no regular pastor, but was occasionally used by visiting ministers; the Catholics held services there while their new church was being built. Later the Pulpit was removed and stored in the basement, and it was used for festivals and even traveling theatrical troupes had their performances there; the building remaining without care, gradually kept falling more and more into a state of dilapidation.

In the later part of the last century, a group of summer residents were instrumental in bringing about an organization that purchased the Church, put the old pulpit in its original position, and restored the entire building. The motive of this movement was to preserve the old sanctuary as a relic of the Island, and fortunately it has saved for us a building that is rich in historic interest and a fine architectural monument to the men who conceived it.

F. Orla Varney
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District Officer
June 30, 1937

FW 7/1/37